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MEMORANDUM

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

CONFIDENTIAL

December 2, 1977

ACTION

MEMORANDUM FOR: ZBIGNIEW BRZEZINSKI

FROM: ROBERT PASTOR *RP*

SUBJECT: President Videla's Call to President Perez
on Oil Price Increase

Several months ago, Francisco Massadri, who works in the office of the Presidency in Argentina, called on me, and we had a very good discussion of the political situation in Argentina. When he learned that I would be accompanying Secretary Vance, he asked to set up a dinner for me with two of the senior officials in the office of the Presidency: Colonel Miguel Mallea Gill, the Under Secretary for Institutional Relations (foreign affairs) and Ricardo Joffre, the Under Secretary-General (domestic affairs and chief political advisor). I was supposed to have had lunch with them on Monday, November 21, but I spent the time during lunch writing and negotiating the Joint Communique, and so I rearranged the schedule and had a three-hour dinner with them that evening.

I was extremely impressed by their perceptive analysis of political and social change in Argentina as well as in the United States. Mallea, in particular, knows the US quite well, having gone to West Point, and having spent a considerable amount of time in the US. I was also impressed by their candor and their willingness to recognize and to address their very difficult human rights problem in Argentina. They also clearly understood the US position on human rights, and did not in any way try to persuade me to reverse that position as it relates to the IFI's, to speeches, to military assistance, or anything. Instead, they accepted our position, and only pleaded for "more time" to be able to consolidate their political base so as to permit the control over political developments which would be reflected, in their mind, in a diminution of repression. As they see it, and this is confirmed by all observers, the most important political cleavage in Argentina is not between the labor unions and the government, nor between the terrorists and the government, but between the Army and the Navy. They see this as a very serious problem, but one which they can handle in time. (This also reflects, as does their entire conversation, Videla's instinctive caution and gradualness.)

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I asked them why the regime did not permit Hector Campora, the transitional President who then handed power to Juan Peron in 1973, to leave the Mexican Embassy for asylum. I said that I never conceived that Campora could possibly be considered a political threat to the Argentine government. In answering my question, they provided me with important insights in the present political situation in Argentina. (These insights were later confirmed in an informal conversation I had with Juan De Onis.) They said that Campora was much more than just a transitional figure; indeed, he had originally organized the return of Peron with the purpose of using Peron as his "figurehead". In turn, a group of technocratic leftists were able to manipulate control from Campora, and these leftists then intended to exercise power through Campora, who would exercise it through Peron. The strategy did not work, simply because Peron remained his own man, and the struggle with the rightists, under Lopez Rega, who was the power behind Isabel Peron at the beginning, then determined the course of political developments in Isabel Peron's government. They fear that if Campora is now permitted to leave, he will become a symbol for this leftist opposition to the present regime in Argentina, and therefore, they are reluctant to permit him to leave.

At the same time they said that the politicians are reluctant to call for an end to the military regime in Argentina at this time and were not likely to do so until sufficient stability in the political situation had been restored. Therefore, one does not see in Argentina, as one sees in Chile, Uruguay, Bolivia, Ecuador, Peru and other military governments, the strong desire by domestic political politicians for a rapid return to civilian government.

The devotion of these three men to President Videla was quite extraordinary, and it rather reminded me of the relatively stronger admiration for President Carter which is held among White House Staff as contrasted with the views of the President held by people in the bureaucracy. What is also clear is the degree of access which they have to Videla. I mentioned the importance of the OPEC price freeze, and we spoke about that at some length. I said that President Videla probably has a fair amount of influence over President Perez, and if he were able to mention to President Perez the importance of a price freeze, we would consider that helpful. The very next day--as you can see by the cable at Tab A--President Videla called President Perez on this issue. I am planning to write a letter to Colonel Mallea just as a way to renew our friendship and to thank him for the conversation and dinner, but I also would like to mention in that letter that I had brought to the attention of President Carter that President Videla had called President Perez, and that President Carter asked to relay through me and Mallea

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his appreciation for President Videla's note of concern to Perez. In the light of the difficulty we have had with other leaders--e.g., the Brazilians did not even raise the issue with the Venezuelans--I think we should give a little positive reinforcement to Videla--not enough for a special letter, but sufficient to have it conveyed in an indirect way. I also think that is a channel we may want to cultivate. I will add that reference in my letter, if you so approve.

Approve

Disapprove

I think Bob should simply mention that we noted that Vizcain called Perez and that this was very much appreciated here.
Rick

Bob, 2B said you should simply thank Mallon -- in a handwritten p.s. at the end of the letter -- along the lines of my note (above).
Rick

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